Access to Health Care

701.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The provision of adequate health services in a custody setting is a constitutional right afforded to all inmates. The purpose of this policy is to provide custody personnel and qualified health care professionals with a process to inform newly booked inmates of the procedure to access health care services and how to use the request system, if necessary.

701.2 POLICY

It is the policy of this office that all inmates, regardless of custody status or housing location, will have timely access to a qualified health care professional and receive a timely professional clinical judgment and appropriate treatment.

The Thurston County Sheriff's Office facility will provide appropriate and cost-effective emergency and necessary medical, dental and mental health care as necessary to maintain the health and well-being of inmates to a reasonable and socially acceptable standard (RCW 70.48.130).

701.3 ACCESS TO CARE

Inmate medical requests will be evaluated by qualified health care professionals. Health care services will be made available to inmates from the time of admission until they are released. Information regarding how to contact the medical staff will be available in all inmate housing areas.

Unreasonable barriers shall not be placed on an inmate’s ability to access health services. Health care that is necessary during the period of imprisonment shall be provided regardless of an inmate’s ability to pay, the size of the facility, or the duration of the inmate’s incarceration (RCW 70.48.130). Such unreasonable barriers include:

- Punishing inmates for seeking care for their health needs.
- Assessing excessive co-payments that prevent or deter inmates from seeking care for their health needs.
- Deterring inmates from seeking care for their health needs by scheduling sick calls at unreasonable times.

All routine requests for medical attention shall be promptly routed to a qualified health care professional.

Any incident of an inmate refusing medical treatment or causing a disruption in the delivery of health care services should be documented in an incident report and a refusal of medical attention form will be signed by the inmate. Related reports or refusal forms shall be forwarded to the contract medical provider and added to the inmate medical record.

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701.4 HEALTH CARE GRIEVANCES

Custody personnel should authorize and encourage resolution of inmate complaints and requests on an informal basis whenever possible. To the extent practicable, custody personnel should provide inmates with opportunities to make suggestions to improve programs and conditions.

Inmates will be informed of the grievance process during inmate orientation. The grievance process is also explained in the electronic inmate handbook, which all inmates have access to in their housing units. Grievances will be handled in accordance with the Inmate Grievances Policy.

Custody personnel should minimize technical requirements for grievances and allow inmates to initiate the grievance process by briefly describing the nature of the complaint and the remedy sought. For simple questions and answers regarding clinical issues, inmates may meet with a qualified health care professional or may submit a written correspondence.

Inmate grievances regarding health care issues will be investigated and all dispositions will be recorded in accordance with the Inmate Grievance Policy. Responses to inmate grievances should be based on the community standard of health care.

If an inmate is not satisfied with the response, the inmate may appeal the grievance as outlined in the Inmate Grievances Policy.

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